

Remarks of Ambassador Sichan Siv
United States Representative to the Economic and Social Council
To the Vietnamese American National Gala
May 2, 2005

Thank you Betty (Nguyen) for the kind words of introduction. I have cut short an overseas trip to be with you all for this very important celebration.

I thank the chairman of tonight's event, Dr. Ngai Nguyen, for his vision and leadership. I second Secretary Elaine Chao's recognition of the many distinguished individuals and honorees. First among equals are Frank Jao and John Duong of California; Ed Moy and Joey Lee of the White House. They are doing an excellent job. In many ways, they and those mentioned have contributed enormously to the advancement of Vietnamese Americans and America itself. So did our dear friend John Tsu, former Chairman of President Bush's Advisory Commission on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders. He passed on recently and is sorely missed.

We are privileged to have heard from Elaine Chao, our distinguished Secretary of Labor. On the flight to Beijing last week, I saw her on a news show at 36,000 feet. At those heights where only angels fly, it was exciting to see her familiar face, speaking on behalf of the United States. I said to myself: "I know her." (*Laughter.*)

On April 30th 1975 North Vietnamese and Vietcong forces captured Saigon and extinguished the light of liberty. That was a tragic day. It also marked the great influx of Vietnamese to the United States. And this has become a cause for celebration. Because Americans of Vietnamese ancestry have truly made an impact throughout our society. Tonight, we honor those in the arts, business, community service, education, and science. I am particularly pleased to note that my former employer LIRS is one of the honorees. I was a social worker trying to help newly arrived refugees adjust to their new lives in America. I remember fondly the dedication of many LIRS staff.

Sadly, this April was also the 30th Anniversary of the fall of Phnom Penh. I was in the "Parrot's Beak," the most southeastern part of Cambodia. I planned to make my way to Vietnam when I learned through VOA that Saigon had already fallen. Many of you have seen my Op-Ed in the New York Times of April 17; you may have also seen an article in the Times magazine section about a Cambodian family saved by a Vietnamese woman. I grew up in Cambodia with Vietnamese neighbors, loving "*pho*." In fact, my wife and I were at Eden Center, Virginia for our regular dose of "*pho*" (*laughter*) when we received leaflets on the April 30th Freedom March. I was half the world away in Shanghai that day, but my spirit was with you. I might be a Vietnamese American because I fit the descriptions in the multimedia presentation, especially the one on karaoke. (*Laughter.*)

Our personal odysseys in these decades bring us together. We continue to seek and support freedom and democracy for ourselves and others. And we will sacrifice if necessary. Many have done it, including our Co-MC of this event Mr. Quang X. Pham.

President Bush has made a forward strategy of freedom and democracy a cornerstone of his foreign policy. This means supporting their rise, and the hope and progress that they bring. This is a clear alternative to hatred and terror. The President has called upon the international community to promote and live these views. This

includes the United Nations that must continue to reform itself to promote these values for today's world.

As President Bush reiterated in his World Freedom Day proclamation of November 9, 2004, “ We stand by those who today are enjoying the blessings of liberty. And we reaffirm our commitment to extending peace and freedom in the world.”

Together, the United States and the allies of democracy are proving that the forces of terror can not stop the momentum of freedom. Today, more than fifty million people who lived under brutal regimes in Afghanistan and Iraq are on the road to democracy.

Many of us came to this great land in the direct wake of fallen worlds in Phnom Penh and Saigon. We have contributed to American culture and strength, and brought hope to our children.

Let us continue to work together, and show the rest of the world the examples of freedom and democracy that make the United States of America the greatest nation on earth.

Thank you. (*Applause.*)

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